

Rules of the Game

Magical Oddities (PartFour)

By Skip Williams



Last week, we considered spell failure and metamagic feats. This week we'll revisit *polymorph* spell effects.

Fun with *Polymorph*

Rules of the game took a long look at polymorph and other kinds of personal transformations a [few months ago](#). A few beleaguered readers, however, have encountered a few snags that we didn't cover before. Here, then, are a few more hints and tips for handling polymorph and other forms of shape shifting:

Assuming New Types: A creature that assumes a new form through a polymorph effect generally assumes all the types and subtypes of the assumed form. It loses its own type, but its base attack bonus and base saving throws don't change. In effect, the polymorphed creature gains the augmented subtype for its original type. For example, a human polymorphed into a cat becomes an animal (augmented humanoid). The change in types makes the polymorphed subject immune to certain effects and attacks that could affect it when in normal form and also makes the subject susceptible to effects and attacks that affect the assumed form. For example, a human polymorphed into a cat is no longer susceptible to the *charm person* spell (despite its augmented humanoid subtype), but it becomes susceptible to a ranger's favored enemy ability (if the ranger has chosen animals as a favored enemy).

Changes in Size: When a *polymorph* spell or effect changes its subject's size, DMs can decide that the size change does not stack with other effects that change the subject's size. For example, a human druid is a Medium creature. Our example druid uses the wild shape class ability to assume the form of a brown bear, which is a Large creature. The druid has used magic to gain one size category. The druid can't benefit from the *enlarge person* spell because the wild shape effect (which works just like the *polymorph* spell) changes the druid's creature type to animal (see previous section). As an animal (albeit temporarily), the druid could benefit from an *animal growth* spell, except that animal growth makes its subject only one size category bigger than normal and the wild shape effect already has increased the druid's size by that amount.

Transforming Equipment: When polymorph magic changes a subject's form, any equipment carried or worn is either worn or held by the new form (and remains functional) if the assumed form is capable of wearing or holding the item. If the assumed form cannot hold or wear the subject's equipment, the equipment melds into the new form and becomes nonfunctional. For example, if you change from a human into an orc (two creatures with the same general size and shape), you can go right on using your armor, weapons, and other gear while in orc form. If, however, you change from a human into a pony, your equipment melds into your new form. The rules suppose that any equipment melded into your assumed form merely vanish into the form. It's fine, however, to assume that the assumed form carries some hint of the melded equipment. For example, if a humanoid assumes an animal form while wearing goggles, the animal form might sport spots or rings around its eyes if you want.

If the subject acquires some piece of gear while in an assumed form, it can go on holding or wearing that equipment when it resumes its normal form if the normal form can hold or wear the equipment. If not, the

equipment falls off and lands at the subject's feet. For example, if a human assumes the form of a horse and allows someone to fit him with a saddle and bridle, those items fall off when the character returns to human form.

Items that might be touching the subject of a *polymorph* spell (or vice versa), but that aren't exactly equipment, usually don't change form along with the subject. For example, a character chained to a wall with a set of manacles probably ought to just slip out of the manacles (or pop them open) when polymorphing.

Other Creatures: A polymorph effect usually transforms only one creature at a time. If a polymorphed subject touches, holds, or carries another creature when changing form, the other creature doesn't change along with the polymorph user. If the polymorph user can share the effect with the other creature (as a wizard can share an effect with his familiar) or the polymorph effect can transform more than one creature at a time, then the two creatures can change form together.

In cases where a change of form results in two creatures sharing the same space on the battlefield when they otherwise could not, it's usually best to have the smaller creature move to a space that can safely hold it and that is adjacent to the larger creature. If no space adjacent to the larger creature is available to hold the smaller creature, it winds up prone in the larger creature's space instead.

Use this rule even in unusual cases. For example, a human uses a polymorph effect to assume the form of some Colossal creature with the swallow whole special attack and then proceeds to swallow several foes of Large size. When the human reverts to normal (Medium) size, the human can no longer hold the Large foes inside. As the human reverts to normal size, just assume the Large foes are ejected from the human's changing body.

Polymorphing and the Shapechanger Subtype: According to the *polymorph* spell description, creatures with the shapechanger subtype can revert to their natural forms as a standard action when they have been polymorphed. This poses a bit of a problem, because a polymorphed creature is supposed to lose all its own subtypes and gain all the assumed form's subtypes (see the section on assuming other types). In this case, DMs may rule that a polymorphed creature always retains its shapechanger subtype when polymorphed.

In Conclusion

That wraps up our look at magical oddities. I hope the advice presented here helps your games run more smoothly in the future.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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